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### **Equality machineries matter: The impact of women's political pressure on European social care policies**

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## Introduction

The Forums in *Social Politics* provide our readers with comparative lenses on current social policy debates. In this volume, two prominent researchers, Jane Lewis and Deborah Brennan, have given us a unique opportunity to consider two welfare states (cast as liberal regimes in various typologies) in which there has been a shift in politics and social politics over the last decade: Howard's Australia, previously dominated by Labor governments, and Blair's UK, previously the bastion of Thatcherism and her conservative legacy. This is not a controlled experiment or classic example of similar cases with different outcomes after political change, as the two authors' in this forum demonstrate. Both governments confront political realities and economic competitive pressures that result in back-pedaling in agendas that promise more than they can deliver—whether these embrace a nostalgic gaze on motherhood as in Howard's conservative ideology or Blair's agenda for Work Family Balance (WFB) Policies and family friendly workplaces. Both cases reveal how path dependencies and core liberal values of “choice” shape the kinds of policy options considered.

In both countries, “choice” is the cornerstone of WFB discourse and policy, and the household is cast as an arena for private choices. Looking at the levers and incentives and disincentives for women and men to create a WFB, both Lewis and Brennan reveal the loaded dice. “Choice” is a discursive device underpinning the Howard government's policies to support conservative family values. For

low- and middle-income mothers, the rewards/penalties do not encourage them to choose to return to employment. In the UK, choice is revealed in policies to encourage women to enter labor market work, but without a policy commitment to actualize WFB. In policy terms and practice, it is taken for granted that women will do the balancing. There is clearly a lack of will to disturb business as usual in the UK: long working hours of men, and few policy supports for men to become active fathers.

From these in-depth analyses, we can see differences over the decade, viewed as policy eras that are attached to two political figures: New Labor after Blair and Neoliberal Conservatism after Howard. In the UK, there has been a discursive and policy shift toward WFB that aims at creating two-earning families, albeit a model of women's one-third to men's two-thirds, and a concern for reducing child poverty. In Australia, there has been a resurgence of a male breadwinner ideology, but the valorization of motherhood does not apply to the poorest single mothers; while high-income dual earner couples are the ones benefiting from tax-based care deductions. There are different rationales for the investment in child-care in the two governments. And differences in preferred forms: the third sector versus corporate childcare. Still, in both countries, there remains a lack of services and supports for women to combine employment with having a family. As Jane Lewis underscores in her article, in English-speaking countries, "there is an historical reluctance on the part of the state to intervene in the private sphere of the family, which a true commitment to WFB implies as it recognizes the need to support men's right to care and women's right to pursue employment."

Moving from advanced industrial welfare states, the next two pieces in this volume look at policies and politics linked to women's employment, care, and health in industrializing societies of the south. Shahra Razavi opens with a challenge to what she calls the "Engelsian myth": the assumption in feminist theorizing on welfare states in the UK and the US that maintains employment is the path to emancipation for women. True this has been challenged by others in issues of *Social Politics*. Razavi, however, in looking from the situation of newly industrializing countries in Latin America and Asia, brings into stark relief the question of whether women's paid work results in emancipation, where women are the main base for low-wage unregulated industries. But interestingly, she does not accept the radical global exploitation thesis at face value either, that footloose capitalism undermines any possibilities for women to achieve some social rights. Instead, her analysis of three contexts for women's employment—Korea, China, and Mexico—reveal

differences across these societies as well as within them: by region, type of industry, public or privately owned companies. The role of women's advocacy groups and civil society organizations is another variable for assessing the possibilities for increasing women's social citizenship. The vibrant women's groups in Korea are the reason why Razavi is more optimistic about the future for employed women's access to social rights.

Feminist actors are mobilized and visible actors in Rousseau's analysis of reproductive health reform in Peru, but they enter a complex and contested arena involving national and supranational actors. This article asks us to consider social policy in its broad political context. What happens to feminist claims for reproductive health reforms and reproductive rights in non-Democratic authoritarian regimes? How are their claims reframed into fertility control that allow human rights abuses? Finally, how do some transnational actors and arenas provide discursive and political opportunities for feminist positions, including the World Bank and IMF while others, the Bush anti-abortion advocates, use their leverage to promote their antagonists, ultraconservative religious groups. Both articles fill an important gap in our understandings of the different dimensions of social policy in industrializing countries.

We reserve a special rubric for articles that bring multilayered and original perspectives to contested social politics issues, for instance, *Perspectives*. "In Abortion and Genocide: The Unbridgeable Gap," in which Woolford and Woolford take us beyond the conventional debates between pro- and anti-abortion advocates, analyzing the discursive borders of the abortion debate. By focusing on the framing of abortion as genocide, they reveal the exclusionary processes that result from this monolithic construction. Their approach is to engage theoretically with those who have co-opted this powerful framing device that allows its users to imbue the fetus with an identity, a moral personhood that is equivalent to genocide, conventionally understood as the systematic destruction of religious, racial, and cultural groups. Their approach is twofold: one that begins with the weaknesses of this misappropriation and the other its consequences; how this exclusionary narrative does not consider contexts of pregnancy without the possibility of abortion, the most dramatic example being rape in genocidal wars whose purpose is to traumatize and demoralize populations. This essay in *Perspectives* brings to mind a prize-winning article in the early years of *Social Politics* by Eileen McDonogh. But, whereas hers is a rights-based argument on pregnancy itself, Woolford and Woolford begin with an ethical contextualized analysis that confronts the very moral construction of a fetal identity and personhood, which in effect, dehumanizes the mother.